

INTERVIEW

with Children's Book Author Dav Pilkey

by Madison Mancini

Questions about Dav Pilkey

Are you married?

Yes. My wife, Sayuri (pronounced Sy-you-dee), and I got married in 2005.

Where do you live now?

We spend most of our time in Washington, Ohio, and Japan.

What is your favorite book that you have written?

I have two favorites: *Super Diaper Baby 2: The Invasion of the Potty Snatchers* and *The Adventures of Ook and Gluk, Kung-Fu Cavemen from the Future*.

George and Harold started out as characters in your Captain Underpants books. Why did you decide to make them “authors”?

A lot of kids had written to tell me that their favorite parts of the Captain Underpants books were the short comic books by George and Harold. To be honest, those are my favorite parts, too. I thought it might be fun to make an entire book by George and Harold, so I started a new series of Captain Underpants books called Tree House Comix in 2002. The first book was *The Adventures of Super Diaper Baby*, which was a huge hit with kids.

I love the fun and challenge of “ghostwriting” for George and Harold because they see things a little differently than I do. Often I'll have to abandon an idea or a joke because I know that George and Harold wouldn't have liked it or thought it was funny. It's OK, though, because it forces me to think of better ideas and better jokes.

How would you describe your fans?

Incredibly smart children with excellent taste.

What was your favorite book or author as a child or teenager?

When I was a kid, my favorite books were: *A Fish Out of Water* by Helen Palmer and P. D. Eastman (illustrator), *Where the Wild Things Are* by Maurice Sendak, and *Georgie and the Robbers* by Robert Bright. Those were the books I remember reading over and over, and I would often grab a stack of paper and try to draw the characters.

The book that influenced me the most as a child was *The Children in the Jungle* by Leif Krantz and Ulf Lofgren (illustrator). It's been out of print for a long time, but this book had a direct influence on many of my books, from *When Cats Dream* to *The Adventures of Ook and Gluk, Kung-Fu Cavemen from the Future*. There's even a three-word sentence from *The Children in the Jungle* that I have used in every Captain Underpants epic novel.

As an adult, I fell in love with the books of James Marshall (George and Martha) and Arnold Lobel (Frog and Toad). I owe so much to the influence of these two wonderful artists and their gentle humor.

Did you have a role model as a kid?

Not really, unless you count the Six Million Dollar Man.

What is your favorite thing to do as an author?

Swim.

What inspires you the most?

I think most of the stories are inspired by memories from my childhood—by the feelings of helplessness and frustration I felt (and I'm sure most kids feel) when I was constantly surrounded by adults who were either mean, dumb, or unfair (and sometimes all three). "Kid empowerment" is a very strong theme in my books.

Which character(s) from your books are the most similar to you?

George and Harold are both based on me when I was in elementary school. Like George and Harold, I was always getting in trouble with one authority figure or another when I was a kid. My troubles usually came from trying to entertain the classroom (with either my comics or my silly behavior).

But unlike George and Harold, I don't think I actually saved the world very often (maybe just once or twice).

Questions about *Super Diaper Baby 2: The Invasion of the Potty Snatchers*

Recently you stopped writing Captain Underpants novels and began making full-length graphic novels by George and Harold. Why?

While I LOVE Captain Underpants and his many friends and enemies, I sometimes want to write about new and different things. The Tree House Comix books (starting with *The Adventures of Super Diaper Baby*) give me a chance to tell new and different stories, while still keeping these adventures “grounded” in the Captain Underpants universe.

Don’t worry, though... Captain Underpants will be back. My next two books will be about him.

Why do you write from the perspective of George and Harold?

Well, George and Harold are both based on me as a kid, so I’m really just trying to write from the perspective of myself—as a *kid*.

Also, writing under pseudonyms is a great way to avoid criticism. For example, if someone says they really like that new book by George Beard and Harold Hutchins, I can say, “Actually, *I* wrote that!” But if someone hates the book, I can say, “Who’s George Beard and Harold Hutchins?”

Did you make spelling mistakes on purpose or are you just really bad at spelling?

Both.

What do you say to adults who complain about the bad spelling?

Actually, I rarely get complaints like that. Most parents and teachers write to express their gratitude because these books were the first books their children ever read—or wanted to read.

If somebody does complain about the spelling, I point out (as politely as possible) that these “mistakes” occur in my books for a reason: I’m secretly trying to inspire kids to write, and to create their own stories and comics.

Unfortunately, there are tons of kids out there who feel stifled, creatively, because they’re afraid of making mistakes. I want to show kids that they can be creative without having to worry about being perfect. My hope is that they’ll be so inspired by George and Harold’s wildly imperfect (but still fun) stories that they’ll pick up a pencil and start creating their own stories “just for fun.”

So far I feel like my plan is working. Each year I get hundreds of original comics and stories sent to me by kids (or their grateful parents or teachers). And yes, many of the stories have misspellings and mistakes. But these stories weren’t homework assignments—they were made for fun. And for many of these kids, it might be the first time they ever realized that writing could be fun. And who knows? That very thought could inspire a lifetime of creativity!

What was the inspiration for the villain, Rip Van Tinkle?

He is actually based on a superhero I created when I was a kid. His name was “Water Man” and he was made completely out of water. Rip Van Tinkle is a lot like Water Man, except that he’s a bad guy and he’s made out of pee-pee. They both have the same powers and abilities, though.

You can read all of my Water Man comics (which I made in 1977 when I was 11 years old) on my website at http://pilkey.com/waterman_intro.php.

How many Super Diaper Baby books will there be?

I only have three planned, but I’m sure I’ll think of more some day.

Do you think your new book *The Adventures of Ook and Gluk, Kung-Fu Cavemen from the Future* will be as popular as your world famous Captain Underpants books?

I think so. It has all the same elements as Captain Underpants (wild adventures, silliness, action, laffs, Flip-O-Rama, etc.), so I’m not surprised that the same kids who love Captain Underpants also love Ook and Gluk. I’m so used to everybody asking when the next Captain Underpants book or the next Super Diaper Baby book will be out. Now everybody’s asking when the next Ook and Gluk book will be coming out.